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INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABIDJAN 001135

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STATE FOR AF/W-EPLUMB

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/06/2017

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SUBJECT: COTE D'IVOIRE: PM'S OFFICE TOUTS OPA PROGRESS AND CRITICIZES DISSENT WITHIN GOVERNMENT

Classified By: POL/ECON CHIEF SILVIA EIRIZ FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (U) Summary. The Prime Minister's spokesman, Meite Sindou, held a press conference November 6 to discuss the status of government efforts to move beyond the current crisis. The most interesting new bits of information he gave: the PM and the President make joint decisions; the President will make four visits to the North before the end of the year; the PM and the President have agreed to a new disarmament scheme; the Minister of Interior has presented to the PM a plan on how to carry out identification of the population; and, the OPA Evaluation and Monitoring Committee will meet November 8.

According to Sindou the Nov 8 meeting will include a decision about which entity will be chosen to produce Ivorian ID cards. Sindou declined to answer questions about a possible cabinet reshuffle but said it was unacceptable for members of the government to criticize the pace of OPA implementation and singled out the PDCI for such behavior.

End Summary.

STATUS OF OPA IMPLEMENTATION

¶2. (SBU) The Spokesman for the Prime Minister's (PM) Office, Meite Sindou, held on November 6 the first of what are supposed to be weekly press conferences. The subject of the first press conference was the current status of the country's "emergence from crisis." Sindou stated that the PM's goal is to stabilize the country, improve rule of law, and hold transparent elections. Sindou said the PM is committed to implementing the Ouagadougou Political Agreement (OPA) and that the President has expressed his good will regarding the process. Sindou said the PM's office seeks to work cooperatively with the Presidency to render government institutions operative and described the permanent dialogue and collaboration between the President and PM as conciliatory governance that allows them to make joint decisions. Sindou criticized the peace agreements that preceded the OPA for setting up the President and Prime Ministers as antagonists. Sindou announced that the President will make 4 visits to the north of the country between mid November and the end of December. He also underscored that the Prime Minister will not be a candidate for the Presidency (Note: At 35 years of age, PM Soro is too young to run for President. End Note.)

¶3. (U) Sindou cited the creation of the Integrated Command Center, the reopening of 30 Courts of Appeals, the return of Prefects and Sub-Prefects to their posts, and the beginning of the "audiences foraines" process (mobile tribunals that will issue birth documentation to those whose births were never registered) as examples of forward movement on implementation of the OPA. Sindou noted that the Prime Minister met with Prefects and sub-Prefects in early October and provided them with funding and materials to allow them to

return to their jobs. He explained that the return of bureaucrats to all parts of the country will be a gradual process.

¶4. (U) Sindou stated that the identification process called for by the OPA began with the September 25 launching of the "audiences foraines." Sindou attributed the delay in the commencement of the "audiences foraines" process to the June 29 attack on PM Soro's plane, noting that before the attack the PM planned to begin the process on July 5. According to the spokesman, the "audiences foraines" have issued 21,000 documents ("jugements suppletifs") and only 6 percent of requests have been rejected. (Note: The numbers provided by the government and the UN have consistently not been the same. The UN reported the week of November 5 a total of 13,285 documents issued but also gave a rejection figure of 6 percent. End Note.) Sindou said preparations are underway to activate the identification process and added that the Minister of Interior has presented a plan to the PM. Sindou said that the "audiences foraines" will need to conclude by February 2008. (Note: The OPA provides that the "audiences foraines" run for 3 months. According to the UN, as of October 29, only 24 teams out of a total of 111 teams had been deployed.)

¶5. (C) Sindou announced that the next meeting of the OPA Evaluation and Monitoring Committee will take place November 8, in Ouagadougou. Sindou stated that a "technical operator" to produce Cote d'Ivoire's national ID cards will be chosen during the meeting. He described the choice of the "technical operator" as a "strategic and political issue." In a response to a question, Sindou added that the choice of the technical operator is up to the President and PM and clarified that he did not say that a "new" technical operator

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will be chosen. The previous one might be chosen or a new one identified. (Comment: Selection of a "technical operator" has been controversial, and the subject of heated action within the government since the Prime Ministership of Banny. SAGEM, a large French company, had been identified as the most likely candidate to win the contract, despite its reported tender of US 100 million, five times that of a rival Belgian group. Banny's staff included a French national who was a former SAGEM executive, which infuriated the UN Operation in Cote d'Ivoire (UNOCI) and prompted a sharply worded letter demanding a detailed explanation of how the process was being decided. Since Soro became Prime Minister in April 2007, the question of the "technical operator" has remained a polemic, with SAGEM's fortunes variably waxing and waning, according to observers close to the decision-makers. The Prime Minister's Office is reportedly leaning towards accepting SAGEM, but is pressuring them to substantially reduce the contract cost. End Comment.)

NEW PLAN FOR DISARMAMENT?

¶6. (SBU) Sindou stated that a committee has been working since July on the functions and total troop strength for Cote d'Ivoire's new, integrated armed forces. In response to a question about disarmament, Sindou said that if the PM did not believe in disarmament, he would not have signed the OPA. Sindou said disarmament has begun and cited the rehabilitation of the sites identified for grouping of combatants and the burning of weapons during the July 30 "Flame of Peace" ceremony in Bouake as concrete results. (Note: The burning of weapons at the Flame of Peace ceremony was widely seen as symbolic. End Note.) According to Sindou the PM has proposed a new disarmament scheme to which the President has agreed. It would allow former combatants to choose to join the new Armed Forces or, if they choose not to or fail to meet the new Armed Forces criteria, to participate in either the civic service program or a rehabilitation and reinsertion program. (Note: Sindou did not explain the difference between civic service and the

rehabilitation/reinsertion program. The civic service program has not yet been set up. End Note.)

¶7. (U) Sindou answered 'no comment' to a question about rumors of a Cabinet reshuffle. The press had recently reported that the Forces Nouvelles (FN) had called for such a shakeup. Sindou noted that it is likely that the PM will meet with FN representatives soon and that the issue is likely to come up since it often does. Sindou said it is unacceptable for members of the government to criticize the government for the slow pace of OPA implementation. He criticized the Democratic Party of Cote d'Ivoire (Parti Democratique de la Cote d'Ivoire - PDCI) in particular for such behavior, noting that its members control strategic ministries that can impact on the speed of OPA implementation.

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